

quickly moving to Portland where he worked for the Army Corp of Engineers. Living far from work in distant South East Portland, Bruce rode a bus to work. He says that experience began shaping his thinking on transportation, equity, land use, and social responsibility. How transportation is provided as a service became part of his life-long critical examination.

He started as a City Engineer for Hillsboro Oregon and then was elevated to the director of Washington County's Land Use and Transportation. Again, ideas of equity, fairness, land use, and transportation continued to churn in his mind.

It came as a shock to many when, as the new director of the Oregon Department of Transportation Region One, he moved headquarters from a suburb to a regional center in downtown Portland. And, he limited employee parking and encouraged the use of transit instead. Transit over traffic. Pretty revolutionary for a leader who oversees freeways and highways to make a land use decision based on transit opportunities and equity for employees and the public.

He took a brief sojourn from ODOT to lead the solid waste efforts at our regional government and because of his tremendous talents, quickly became Metro's Chief Operating Officer.

He was then tapped by the governor and state legislature to lead the Oregon Department of Transportation. His service was remembered as a healing time for the agency with the legislature and closing the urban/rural divide.

He planned on retiring from ODOT, but was recruited to become the director of the Portland Development Commission where he supported small business development programs for communities of color; light rail construction in downtown; and one of his proudest achievements, the creation of affordable housing.

He tried to retire once again, but duty called. He was asked to be the temporary Hillsboro City Manager.

Oregon's governor most recently tapped Bruce to chair the TriMet Board of Directors. Under Bruce's leadership, TriMet built the Orange Line with the stunning Tilikum Crossing and using a historic number of minority certified contractors. Also, under construction currently is the Division Transit Project employing the largest minority contract award in Oregon's history.

During his free time, Bruce serves on boards of the Volunteers of America and Helping Hands, helping people in recovery.

A calming influence, famous for bringing people together, and settling problems, this leader is still trying to retire. It won't surprise me if he is tapped again. But until that time, I thank Bruce Warner.

INVESTING IN A NEW VISION FOR THE ENVIRONMENT AND SUR- FACE TRANSPORTATION IN AMERICA ACT

SPEECH OF

HON. JOE COURTNEY

OF CONNECTICUT

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, June 30, 2021

Mr. COURTNEY. Mr. Speaker, I rise to express my support for the INVEST Act which fi-

nally, at long last, includes robust funding for roads, bridges, rail, and new incentives to address climate change equity and most importantly job creation. However, I want to clearly state my deep concerns for an amendment adopted by the House, which creates a so-called North Atlantic Rail Interstate Compact to control the development of high-speed rail.

I share the intent of the authors of the amendment to support high-speed rail throughout the Northeast. Connecticut and the Northeast region are home to some of the most densely-populated areas of the country, which are served well by mass transit, and high-speed rail would have significant positive impacts for our region and our nation as a whole. That is why I am proud to support the underlying bill, which triples funding to Amtrak and provides a 500 percent increase in the funding dedicated to improving high speed and passenger rail. The resources provided in the INVEST Act signal an unprecedented opportunity for the New England region, at the state and federal levels, to work together with common purpose to build on the work already being done to expand rail service in the northeast.

I remain concerned, however, about an amendment added to En Bloc No. 1 to establish a North Atlantic Rail compact. While I appreciate the goals of this proposal, I believe that it is duplicative of existing interstate regional rail efforts and short-circuits established cooperative long term rail planning in the region. The North Atlantic Rail compact has as a goal a multi-phase rail development vision for the northeast that includes initial "early action" projects, many of which are already under development, and longer term goals of a cross-Long Island Sound tunnel and a new right of way across the rural communities of eastern Connecticut. Notably, many of these longer term goals reflect previously considered plans for rail expansion in the northeast and contradicts already-completed environmental assessments for existing high-speed rail plans and could cause significant negative environmental impacts in our region.

The Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) has already done extensive study on many of the concepts listed in the North Atlantic Rail plan which have been ruled out as part of the Northeast Corridor (NEC) FUTURE comprehensive plan for the route from Washington, D.C. to Boston, Massachusetts. The existing NEC FUTURE plan has taken years of work with stakeholders with thousands of public comments and has met crucial environmental milestones to move forward. As noted by Amtrak in a June 28, 2021 letter to the House Transportation & Infrastructure Committee opposing the underlying compact proposal in the amendment, "Amtrak, state DOTs, the NEC Commission and FRA already have the institutional capabilities, the collaborative framework and the requisite rights to advance high-speed and other intercity passenger rail service in New England."

This compact as proposed in the amendment is also duplicative of existing regional rail cooperation between the Northeast Corridor states. The Northeast Corridor Commission and the NEC Future plan has been developed in partnership with state departments of transportation, metropolitan planning organizations, and local communities. In contrast, the NAR has been included as part of this bill without the support of major stakeholders such as the

Connecticut Department of Transportation and without clear plans for oversight, transparency and public engagement that are inherent in existing regional planning efforts and state and federal agencies.

This is a critical flaw, as many of the goals at the core of this compact would occur in and disproportionately impact Connecticut in the near and long term. As an alternative, the underlying bill authorizes expansion of interstate rail compacts that would be competitively approved and funded to develop plans to expand high speed rail through interstate cooperation and coordination. That is the approach that should be taken on this effort, rather than a duplicative organization without the full buy in of critical stakeholders.

I appreciate that there have been significant changes that Chairman DEFAZIO of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee and his professional staff made to the original NAR proposal, including making the North Atlantic Rail into an interstate compact instead of a federally-chartered special purpose entity, and most critically, requiring ratification from each state in order to go into effect in that state. The original proposal would have created an unaccountable federally-chartered entity with control of funds and eminent domain, which the Committee wisely eliminated from the plan. Unfortunately, these improvements still fail to justify the need for an additional interstate compact on top of existing state and regional entities and requires extensive evaluation and review as this bill moves forward.

As the House and Senate come together to finalize the surface transportation reauthorization bill, I will continue to raise these concerns with lead Congressional negotiators. Additionally, I hope that my colleagues consider weighing these impacts against the existing mechanisms which are already in place to create high-speed rail in the Northeast, including NEC FUTURE, and the underlying authority the bill provides to expand cooperative interstate rail compacts. Just last week on June 24, all 18 voting members on the Northeast Corridor Commission unanimously approved the CON-NECT NEC 2035 plan, a 15-year action plan to rebuild the Northeast Corridor, and which could provide \$70 billion in state-of-good repair funds over the next 15 years. The existing framework of the NEC FUTURE already has the organization, funding, environmental safeguards, stakeholder support, and local buy-in to make high-speed rail a reality for our region more quickly and more effectively than the NAR proposal could do.

In closing, despite these concerns, which I believe can and will be addressed in the process and based on the overall historic opportunity that the INVEST Act provides, I will vote in the affirmative to keep this process moving forward.

JUNE 28, 2021.

Hon. PETER DEFAZIO,
Chairman, Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, House of Representatives, Washington, DC.

Hon. SAM GRAVES,
Ranking Member, Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, House of Representatives, Washington, DC.

DEAR CHAIRMAN DEFAZIO AND RANKING MEMBER GRAVES: I am writing to express Amtrak's concerns about reports that the House may include in the INVEST in America Act an amendment that would create a "North Atlantic Rail Compact" (NARC) with

an ostensible charge to construct an ill-defined “North Atlantic Rail Network.” Amtrak is strongly opposed to the adoption of this amendment and the likely negative consequences of such a decision for the Northeast Corridor and the national rail network. Adopting the amendment would establish—without any hearings, committee consideration, studies or opportunity for those impacted by the proposal to be heard—support for an infeasible proposal, previously rejected because of the harm it would do to the environment, by an advocacy group called North Atlantic Rail (NAR) to build a new, up to 225 mph dedicated high-speed rail line between New York City and Boston.

The dedicated high-speed rail line’s route (NAR Alignment) would not follow the existing Northeast Corridor (NEC) alignment that parallels Interstate 95. Instead, it would travel beneath the East River in a new tunnel; cross dense urban sections of Queens and Long Island to Ronkonkoma; turn north to Port Jefferson; traverse the Long Island Sound in a 16-mile tunnel to Stratford, Connecticut; and after passing through New Haven and Hartford, turn east across Eastern Connecticut and Rhode Island to Providence, from which it would follow the existing NEC rail corridor to Boston. Most of the line would be built on elevated viaducts. Extensive portions of the high-speed line would need to be constructed along newly acquired and cleared rights-of-way on which there are no rail lines or existing transportation corridors today.

Building a high-speed rail line along the NAR Alignment was evaluated in the comprehensive, five-year NEC FUTURE planning and environmental review process—and rejected in the Record of Decision (ROD) issued by the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) in 2017 because of the harm it would cause to the environment, its costs and failure to provide needed investment to the existing NEC. Instead, FRA, eight NEC states, the District of Columbia and Amtrak endorsed a Preferred Alternative that would increase track capacity and speeds along the existing NEC alignment, and build dedicated high-speed tracks parallel to it where warranted, to minimize environmental impacts and benefit all Amtrak and commuter passengers on the NEC rather than just those traveling on high-speed trains.

The prior rejection of the NAR Alignment is not the only crucial fact undisclosed in the cursory description of the NAR Proposal on NAR’s website and in its handouts.

Federal safety regulations governing Tier III (above 186 mph) high-speed rail equipment would preclude the operation of conventional speed (125 mph or less) intercity and commuter trains over any portion of the NAR Alignment. This means that passengers traveling from currently served NEC cities such as Stamford or Bridgeport to Boston would have to change trains to travel on high-speed trains over the NAR Alignment, as would passengers from New London, Springfield, and Northern New England. It also means that New York City-to-Boston trains would not be able to operate above 160 mph—which will soon be the maximum speed between New York City and Boston—over the NAR Alignment until the entire line was completed, which NAR acknowledges would be decades away.

While NAR’s advocates claim that the NAR HSR Line would cost \$84.6 billion, and

“Early Action Projects” (investments in other New England rail corridors) an additional \$23.4 billion, they have not provided any engineering or cost study to substantiate those figures.

Building a new 240-mile high-speed rail line, much of it through heavily populated areas where there is no existing rail line or right-of-way, would require purchasing or condemning innumerable homes and businesses, and routing the line through parks and wetlands. Maps prepared for the NEC Future study indicate that the least intrusive route along the NAR Alignment would:

Bisect Forest Park in Queens on a viaduct, and travel in a trench through Eisenhower County Park in Nassau;

Be built on trenches or viaducts through residential neighborhoods and business districts alongside the Long Island Rail Road’s heavily traveled Main, Hempstead and Ronkonkoma Lines (on which service would have to be curtailed during construction); and

Follow new alignments, primarily on viaducts, between Ronkonkoma and Port Jefferson, and through numerous communities, parks and wetlands between Hartford and Providence.

While the “Early Action Projects” listed on NAR’s website are all worthwhile projects, they are not new ideas and have no connection to NAR’s high-speed line proposal. In fact, most of them would not connect with a high-speed line built along the NAR Alignment. The massive levels of funding it would consume would make it less likely that these projects would be funded.

Likewise, a federal funding commitment to the NAR Alignment—which would cost more than the Biden Administration’s proposed investment in all passenger rail projects throughout the country—would leave little federal funding available for projects in other regions.

The amendment would give NARC, the Compact it creates, responsibility for planning and constructing the New York City-to-Boston high-speed rail line. NARC would be tasked with planning other New England passenger rail improvement projects, a responsibility currently held by FRA, the states, the NEC Commission and Amtrak. NARC would gain these important and complex responsibilities once only two of the seven New England states ratified the compact creating it, even though it would have no resources or employees at that time. It would be governed by an unwieldy 17-member Board on which the federal government and each NEC state would have the same number of votes (two) on issues relating to the construction of a federally-funded high-speed rail line from New York City to Boston as Maine, New Hampshire, and Vermont. Oddly, the amendment would not give NARC the legal authority possessed by Amtrak and states to condemn properties necessary for the construction of the NAR Alignment, or the remedies Amtrak has if freight railroads that own rail lines on which Early Action Projects would be constructed decline to allow those projects.

Amtrak recognizes that the advocates for the NAR proposal are well-intentioned. We share their vision of faster service between New York City and Boston, where Amtrak carries more travelers than all airlines combined despite inadequate infrastructure and

investment that makes the trip on Acela 45 minutes longer than traveling the same distance from New York City to Washington. The best way to accomplish that is to advance the series of investments contemplated by NEC Future, which will produce near-term benefits—shorter trip times and more trains—for all NEC rail users as each project is completed.

Fifty years after the creation of Amtrak, the stars are finally aligning in ways that would provide New England with the improved and expanded high-speed, intercity and commuter service it needs and deserves. For the first time in Amtrak’s history, we have an Administration, a Congress and multiple New England state partners who support making the types of investments other countries have made to develop world class passenger rail services. Because of climate change, an unprecedented pandemic, a growing population, and increasing congestion in other modes, the need for investments in passenger rail service to provide mobility, reduce emissions and spur an economic recovery has never been greater. Amtrak and our state partners stand ready to seize that opportunity.

Two months ago, I testified before your committee to urge support for investments to reduce trip times between New York City and Boston to less than two hours and thirty minutes. Amtrak and our New England state partners along the NEC are about to begin one of the most important steps in that process: a study to evaluate alternative alignments—including their environmental and community impacts—for increased capacity and higher speeds between New Haven and Providence to identify a Preferred Alternative, as contemplated by the NEC FUTURE ROD. The NEC Commission is about to release its CONNECT NEC 2035 report, a 15-year roadmap for implementing NEC FUTURE’s vision for expanded and faster passenger rail service. In April, we released our “Amtrak Connects US” vision that would provide or expand Amtrak service, also over a 15-year time period, on the same intercity corridors off the NEC Main Line that are included in the NAR’s list of “Early Action Projects.”

Amtrak, state DOTs, the NEC Commission and FRA already have the institutional capabilities, the collaborative framework and the requisite rights to advance high-speed and other intercity passenger rail service in New England. Right now would be the worst possible time to throw a monkey wrench into the progress they are making by creating a new bureaucracy with poorly defined and overlapping aims and yet no institutional capability. Continuing to move forward with the NEC FUTURE investment program, which has already received Tier I environmental clearance, and advancing the “Amtrak Connects US” vision and state rail plans, offer the best, fastest, most cost-effective and most environmentally responsible path to achieving the improved and expanded high-speed, intercity passenger and commuter rail service that residents of New England expect and deserve.

Sincerely,

WILLIAM J. FLYNN,
Chief Executive Officer, Amtrak.